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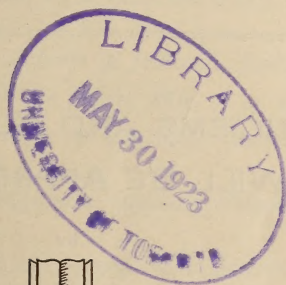


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HOW CAN  
EMPLOYEE RELATIONS BE  
IMPROVED ON THE  
RAILWAYS?

by Roy V

Wright.



*A Catechism Presented Before the November Meeting of the  
Central Railway Club and Reprinted from the Railway Age  
of December 9, 1922.*

CRITICISMS AND SUGGESTIONS  
WILL BE APPRECIATED

BY

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# How Can Employee Relations Be Improved?\*

A Catechism That Develops Certain Truths Which  
Must Be Recognized if Conditions  
Are to Be Bettered

By Roy V. Wright  
Managing Editor, *Railway Age*

*Question.* What is a railroad for?

*Answer.* To furnish adequate transportation for freight and passengers—in short, to serve the public.

*Question.* Who actually performs the detail work in rendering this service?

*Answer.* The rank-and-file of railroad employees.

*Question.* How does the public want to be served?

*Answer.* With courtesy, promptness, certainty and as cheaply as possible.

*Question.* Are the employees specially trained to serve in this way?

*Answer.* Apparently not, except in a limited number of cases, and even then often only to a limited degree.

*Question.* Should this special training apply only to those employees who come in actual contact with the traveling public and the shippers?

*Answer.* No! Every employee can contribute to more efficient or more economical operation. Sometimes it may be in an obscure place or in a seemingly very indirect way. If the contribution is in more economical operation or in the elimination of waste of some sort resulting in more economical operation—and even without coming in contact with the patrons of the road—it is important because it means that better service can be rendered at the same rates or the rates can be lowered for the same service. On some roads with limited earnings or deficits it may even mean keeping them out of bankruptcy.

*Question.* Are the employees generally imbued with this spirit of service?

*Answer.* No.

*Question.* Give some illustrations to prove this.

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\* Presented in the discussion of a paper on "The Training of Men to Act in Supervisory Capacities and Best Results in Handling Men," which was read before the meeting of the Central Railway Club on Thursday, November 23, 1922, by F. W. Brazier, assistant to the general superintendent of rolling stock, New York Central Railroad.



*Answer.* (1) The attitude of indifference, sometimes even bordering on discourtesy, on the part of some ticket sellers, agents, conductors, brakemen, gatemen, porters, waiters, freight house employees, clerks, etc., toward the patrons, particularly if of humble appearance, is one illustration<sup>1</sup>—and this in face of the fact that the patrons of the railroad are all cash customers.

(2) Another evidence of the disloyalty toward railroad managements on the part of some employees, is indicated by the unfair and misleading propaganda promoted among many classes of employees through some brotherhood magazines and by so-called labor economists or experts employed by the men. In this respect one quotation in Mr. Brazier's paper is specially significant: "A mule cannot pull while he is kicking, and he cannot kick while he is pulling." What sort of service is being given by employees who are interested in promoting and spreading such propaganda?

*Question.* The above illustrations are only typical and may be multiplied many times over. In the last analysis, whose fault is it that such conditions exist?

*Answer.* The managements'.

*Question.* Surely your answer is wrong! It is inconceivable that railroad managements would knowingly allow such conditions to exist if it were in their power to remove them. Can you prove your point?

*Answer.* There are several reasons for the failure of railroad managements to realize their full duty and responsibilities and discharge them properly. In the first place, it would almost seem—at least in many respects—that they feel the patrons are under a distinct obligation to them when they condescend to sell them transportation and to serve them. Except in a few cases no real salesmanship<sup>2</sup> ability is shown in dealing with the customers, and no attempt has been made to train even those employees who are engaged in the actual selling processes in the principles of real salesmanship. Moreover, in these days even banks and professional men advertise for business, and yet the railroads with all that they have to sell, spend a mere pittance<sup>3</sup> for real advertising.

*Question.* Would the amount of transportation as a whole be increased by better salesmanship and more real advertising? Does not the amount of railroad transportation sold

<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in the following articles which have appeared in the *Railway Age*: "Do Railways Lack the Selling Sense?" December 2, 1922, page 1039; "A Shipper Comments on Railroad Morale," November 18, 1922, page 929; "Observation of a Transcontinental Traveler," March 11, 1922, page 583.

<sup>2</sup> See "Do Railways Lack the Selling Sense?" *Railway Age*, December 2, 1922, page 1039.

<sup>3</sup> See "Railroads and Public Relations Advertising," *Railway Age*, November 25, 1922, page 967.

depend directly on general business prosperity in the same way as does the sale of postage stamps?

*Answer.* Decidedly no! Passenger traffic,<sup>4</sup> especially, can be greatly increased by the right sort of salesmanship and advertising. Skillful railroad development departments<sup>5</sup> have found many ways of developing new business. Salesmanship and advertising<sup>6</sup> can be made to pay in many *direct ways*.

*Question.* Why emphasize *direct ways*? What other good results will follow?

*Answer.* Shippers and patrons, often irritated and even angered by indifference and ignorance on the part of railway employees, may be converted into friends,<sup>7</sup> and surely the railroads need friends today more than they ever needed them before.

*Question.* What is another reason for your reference to the failure of the railway managements?

*Answer.* They have failed to take the employees and the public into their confidence as to their problems, finances, etc. This has allowed a degree of mystery to creep into the business, particularly since there are persons who have been ready—through ignorance, or for other reasons—to spread misleading propaganda as to the earnings, valuations, etc. Except in a few cases—the Illinois Central<sup>8</sup> is one notable example—the managements have done little in a large way to remedy this by giving general publicity to the facts.

*Question.* What do you regard as another failure of railway managements?

*Answer.* The managements have failed,<sup>9</sup> as the systems have grown larger and larger and the rank and file has been further and further removed from the chief executives, to give the necessary attention to the selection, training and promotion of employees.<sup>10</sup> Men have often been promoted to

<sup>4</sup> See "Public Relations Work and Advertising" (Communication). *Railway Age*, April 22, 1922, page 953.

<sup>5</sup> See annual reports of the meetings of the American Railway Development Association.

<sup>6</sup> See "On 'Selling' the Railroads," *Railway Age*, February 18, 1922, page 410; "One Big Thing That Is the Matter With the Railroads," *Railway Age*, February 25, 1922, page 457; "Positive Public Relations Work," *Railway Age*, March 18, 1922, page 723.

<sup>7</sup> See "Why Not Sell the Necessary Service at a Profit?" *Railway Age*, March 4, 1922, page 505; "Public Relations Work," *Railway Age*, March 11, 1922, page 553; "For a Better Understanding Between the Railways and the Public," *Railway Age*, April 22, 1922, page 954; "More About Public Relations Work," *Railway Age*, May 20, 1922, page 1155.

<sup>8</sup> See "Public Relations Work on the Illinois Central," *Railway Age*, October 8, 1921, pages 654 and 683.

<sup>9</sup> See "Developing Machinery and Neglecting Men," *Railway Age*, September 16, 1922, page 495.

<sup>10</sup> See "Getting Better Results From Railroad Organizations," *Railway Age*, February 25, 1921, page 459; "Benefits Derived From Apprentice Training," *Railway Age*, March 18, 1921, page 714; "Training and Developing the Railroad Worker," *Railway Age*, March 18, 1921, page 719; "Management Problems and the Human Element," *Railway Age*, June 10, 1921, page 1309 and August 20, 1921, page 325.



the position of foreman purely because of their abilities as craftsmen, or because of their technical knowledge rather than that they understood men, or knew how to direct them. These untrained foremen have frequently irritated and antagonized the men under them when they should have been building up a spirit of loyal co-operation and teamwork among them. Several years are required to train a machinist in the operation of a few simple tools, and yet no special training is given a foreman to fit him to direct the most complicated and highest type of machine in the world—the human being. President Smith of the New York Central is responsible for the statement that “the efficiency of a railroad depends principally upon its men. It is estimated that 95 per cent of railroading is human”—and yet what a lack of appreciation is shown on most roads for taking advantage of the most up-to-date and scientific knowledge concerning the successful handling and direction of human energy.<sup>11</sup>

A number of large industries have found that it paid well to develop limited but intensive training courses for foremen and other officers, or for prospective foremen. These courses have proved so popular and have been so thoroughly appreciated by both the men and the managements where they have been properly conducted, that it would seem the railroads could well afford to develop similar courses of training for their foremen.

Another splendid way of inspiring and training foremen and officers is through the conventions or meetings of their various associations. While these organizations are largely technical, fortunately a few of them have recognized that the human problem was, after all, one of the most important problems which confronted them and have talked the question over frankly both in their open meetings and among themselves outside of the regular sessions. These conventions and meetings act as clearing houses for the best practices and thoughts and should be encouraged.

It is unfortunate that the Mechanical Division, A. R. A., the parent organization in the mechanical department, has failed to recognize this and has limited its committee investigations and the convention proceedings largely to questions relating to equipment standards. It is to be hoped that the mere fact that there has been little time for the preparation of committee reports during recent months will automatically force the consideration at the 1923 meeting of questions relating to employees' relations, through the presentation of individual papers or reports by men who are specially quali-

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<sup>11</sup> “A Personnel Department For the Railways,” *Railway Age*, June 18, 1920, page 1921; “Importance of the Human Element in Railroading,” *Railway Age*, October 22, 1920, page 691; “Labor Turnover—Not a Disease But a Symptom,” *Railway Age*, December 31, 1920, page 1157; “The Functions of a Railway Employment Service,” *Railway Age*, February 4, 1921, page 329; “Job Analysis and Job Specification,” *Railway Age*, September 3, 1921, page 445; “Our Road,” *Railway Age*, September, 23, 1922, page 549.

fied to consider the various aspects of the personnel question.

*Question.* In what other way have the managements failed?

*Answer.* In realizing that autocracy must be replaced by a spirit of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

*Question.* Hold on a minute, you say. This is no place to preach radicalism, socialism or communism. You had better stop where you are.

*Answer.* The above statement might have been challenged successfully 10 or 20 years ago, but times have been changing rapidly for the better. No one would accuse the Pennsylvania Railroad<sup>13</sup> of being radical; its position has usually been considered quite conservative. That road has summarized its present policy and practice in its relation with its employees in this sentence: "To give all employees an opportunity to have a voice in the management in all matters affecting their wages, working conditions and welfare; and in other matters of mutual concern affecting the welfare of the company and of the public which the company serves."

*Question.* Are you going to take things out of the hands of the management? What will become of discipline?

*Answer.* No. The employees can participate in the above mentioned matters and yet it will be possible to preserve the strictest sort of discipline. It is, of course, necessary to have thoroughly understood just what are the rights and responsibilities of the management and just what are the rights and responsibilities of the employees.

*Question.* Is this in any way related to the training of men to act in supervisory capacities?

*Answer.* If the representatives of the employees gather around the table with the representatives of the management to discuss matters relating to wages, working conditions and welfare, both sides will come to understand each other much better. Moreover, the bringing up of grievances and the receiving of constructive suggestions from the men should automatically locate weak spots in the organization and foremen and officers who do not understand how to deal with men properly. Efforts can then be concentrated upon these men to coach and train them to deal with the men in the right way. In most cases an immediate improvement will be noted. In some cases where the men are unfitted for the handling of men they can be transferred to positions which

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<sup>12</sup> See "The Human Problems of Modern Industry," *Railway Age*, November 25, 1922, page 977.

<sup>13</sup> See "Employee Representation on the Pennsylvania," *Railway Age*, October 14, 1922, pages 682 and 691 and November 11, 1922, pages 874 and 876.



do not require their coming in contact with the men in a supervisory capacity.

*Question.* This matter of employee representation looks good and the scheme seems logical, but is not something else needed to insure its success?

*Answer.* Yes. It will fail unless it is dominated by justice and the spirit of a square deal.

*Question.* You fail to use the expression "Golden Rule," which is so much in vogue. Did you do this intentionally?

*Answer.* Yes.

*Question.* Why?

*Answer.* The term "Golden Rule," rightly interpreted, is far more satisfactory than the expression we have used, but it has been applied so thoughtlessly and carelessly that it is to be feared it has lost its real force and meaning to many of those who use it. Obviously, if we are to solve the human relations problem on the railroads, thus insuring the most efficient and economical transportation and the best service to the public, we must inject a real spirit of brotherhood into the railroad organizations. In other words, the Golden Rule must be applied in its best and strongest sense.

*Question.* This sounds Utopian and possibly borders a bit too closely on the religious. Why try to put something into the transportation industry that commercial and industrial interests do not recognize?

*Answer.* Hold up! You are going too fast. Not a few industries and at least one large Chamber of Commerce have come out clearly and forcefully for a more widespread recognition of the Golden Rule in the business world.

Consider the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, for instance. That body appointed an industrial relations committee to look into the question of industrial unrest, determine what caused it and suggest a remedy. The committee came to the conclusion that basically it was caused by a too prevalent spirit of greediness and suspicion. The remedy suggested by the committee, enthusiastically endorsed by the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, was the recognition of the Golden Rule in its best and highest sense. Attention was directed to the fact that the success of our forefathers in establishing a democracy in this country was due to the fact that they were inspired by a spirit of service and unselfishness and looked to Divine Providence for inspiration and leadership. United States Senator George Wharton Pepper in speaking to the group of 850 business men of Philadelphia, who later adopted what is known as the Golden Rule Pledge, stated that labor and capital could not be reconciled by any of the mechanical methods which trusted in force,



but that "we must go back to God." The Golden Rule Pledge which was adopted by the Chamber of Commerce, and which is receiving endorsement by other similar bodies, and is being enthusiastically promoted by Philadelphia business men, follows:

### Golden Rule Pledge

"*As Americans*, we recognize that we face a crucial condition in our social, political and industrial life, which, if not corrected, can lead only to individual and national disaster.

"*We Recognize* that the trend of combining interests of individuals and groups will continue.

"*But We Likewise Recognize* that such interests in the creation of their relationships to the many must be controlled by the spirit of equity and reason if they are to endure.

"*Unjust Exploitation* of the many by the few, regardless of its position or field of activity, cannot continue, for self-preservation would force all citizens into hostile groups.

"*The Remedy* of our present malady lies in approaching the interests of others, be they employer or employee, buyer or seller, producer or distributor, individual or group, in a spirit of fairness actuated by the *Golden Rule*.

### Facts

"We are all workers.

"The United States is our union.

"Our membership is over 100,000,000 in good standing.

"Our allegiance is first to God and then to that union.

"Our nation is a living expression of belief in our Creator.

"Liberty is our human right by Divine right.

"The Declaration of Independence acknowledges American liberty to be a gift of God: 'All men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. \* \* \* \* With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.'  
—*Declaration of Independence*.

"The Declaration of Independence establishes, without discrimination

Independence of person

Independence of property and

Independence of contract.

"The Declaration of Independence is maintained by the Constitution of the United States.

"The Constitution of the United States is administered by representative government.

"Our representative government is controlled by public opinion.

"Public opinion is based on ignorance, illusion, prejudice—or knowledge, truth, judgment.

"The Declaration of Independence—the Constitution of

the United States—and representative government will be maintained or destroyed by public opinion! Public opinion is what men think. Our problem is not to change habits, laws or men, but to make facts the basis of thinking.

*"We, as Americans, recognizing the fundamental nature of the above facts, do hereby declare that we will in all ways urge upon our associates, and those with whom we come in contact, the importance of making facts the basis of their thinking, and*

*"We Pledge our loyalty and renew our allegiance to God and Country to the end 'That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that the government of the people, by the people and for the people' (Lincoln) shall be sustained."*

*Question.* This sounds well, but can it be interpreted in the terms of actual practical application? Does it not border too much on the sentimental?

*Answer.* Many schemes and methods have been suggested and tried throughout the industrial world for replacing the friction and unrest between the employees and the managements with a spirit of co-operation and teamwork. Some of these plans have proved eminently successful, but only to the degree that they were dominated by a sincere appreciation of the spirit of a square deal, based on the Golden Rule. Looking at the facts frankly, it must be admitted that the most serious problem confronting the railroads today is that of employees' relations. Railroad managements and railroad employees realize that things are not as they should be, and that they cannot continue on the present basis. Both sides are earnestly seeking relief from this impossible situation. Unless the spirit of friction and unrest that exists in many cases can be replaced by a spirit of co-operation and teamwork, the railroads are surely headed toward disaster, which will, in the last analysis, affect adversely the interests of the public, the employees and the investors. The old methods of organization and of directing the human element have failed absolutely. The one thing that is left, and the only one which promises any real relief and success, is that which has been suggested in this catechism.

*What could the railroads not do in giving better and more adequate service to the public, in improving the living conditions of the employees, and in insuring a fair return to the investors if the organizations could be dominated by the Golden Rule—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, and thou shalt do unto others as ye would have them do unto you."*





